

PLANNING

A

HEALTH

FAIR

People have a natural curiosity about their health. They want to know everything they can about those big and little things that affect their everyday lives. One of the best ways they can get this information is through a health fair. And, that makes a health fair a valuable tool your agency can use to reach large numbers of people.

A health fair should be conducted in an upbeat, easily digested format. It could focus on a single topic, such as smoking cessation, or on a single audience, such as the elderly; or it could cover many health-related issues for a number of audiences. Properly handled, a health fair is an ideal way for your organization to present health education and counseling, and allows you to communicate a wealth of information on a variety of health issues and services.

Health Fairs Come in All Sizes

A health fair is easier to organize than you may think. You are the one who controls the size and complexity of the health fair. It can be as simple as a table with posters and pamphlets. Or, it can be a three-day affair that fills the local park.

A health fair is anything you choose. It's exhibits, mini-workshops, displays, demonstrations, screenings and more. The possibilities are endless — from eye tests to foot check-ups. What matters is that it brings people and health professionals together.

Designing Your Health Fair

To organize a successful health fair, sit down with a pencil and paper, define your audience, the message you want to deliver, and who could help you deliver that message.

Your audience could be the general public or a “special interest group,” such as senior citizens, women or the poor. The location and hours will influence the type of audience. A health fair in a park or shopping center on a weekend will attract a different audience than an event at a business complex on a weekday.

The intended audience will determine the message. Different groups have different concerns: senior citizens and nutrition; middle-aged people and cholesterol; children and dental health; women and breast cancer; etc.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

Local involvement is the key to a successful health fair. Your community has its share of potential sponsors, volunteers and exhibitors. Draw up a resource list that includes health professionals, service organizations, community leaders, businesses and labor groups. Don't neglect student groups from high schools, colleges and universities — they are important sources of volunteer support. Help is also available from women's, neighborhood and other advocacy groups.

In your search for a sponsor, approach the executive directors or managers of local organizations. Detail your plans and needs, and determine what they can supply in terms of manpower and materials. The organization may also have a public

relations unit that could help you get the message out through daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, and the internal publications and newsletters that many businesses use to communicate with their employees. If this resource isn't available, you'll need to organize your own publicity program.

Spread the Word

The publicity coordinator will have one of the most important and demanding jobs. He or she will need to prepare press releases, feature stories, public service announcements or advertisements, editorials, posters and hand-out materials, and organize a press conference or press kit. Important facts to include are: site, date, time, selected activities, organizations involved as exhibitors, name(s) of organization(s) sponsoring the event and a phone number to call for more information. Put creativity into your posters and flyers — they should not only inform, but motivate people to attend. Public service announcements to radio and television stations should be packaged as 10-, 20- and 30-second spots.

A Health Fair is . . .

A model health fair can be divided into the areas of health education, screening, counseling and follow-up.

Health Education - It's the most important facet of a health fair. Health education might include a poster or exhibit on nutrition, or a nutritionist preparing a low cholesterol meal. It could be a display on cancer risks, or a computer health risk evaluation. When making choices, remember that passive displays of information will not attract large numbers. People like exhibits with which they can interact.

Screening - You will find the longest lines at blood pressure and other screening tests. People want to know about themselves.

The easiest screening tests to set up are height and weight, blood pressure, anemia and vision acuity. Others, which may require more resources, are screenings for cancer, glaucoma, hearing, high blood cholesterol and genetic disorders. Whenever laboratory tests are involved, consult the public health law for requirements that must be met.

Counseling and Referral - The counseling session allows a trained counselor to outline actions that need to be taken in order to eliminate poor health habits. Such counseling stops short of diagnosis. Counselors can encourage lifestyle changes in such areas as nutrition, stress and smoking. Where indicated, the individual may be urged to see his or her usual health provider, or be given information on local health care facilities or local health-related agencies and organizations.

Follow-up - This can be done through mailings, by telephone or through classes and other programs available in the community. Delivery of test results through follow-up mailings or telephone calls can motivate participants to take action. You can also call participants, three to six months after the health fair, as a reminder and an encouragement.

Your Checklist to Success

A health fair takes forethought — about four to six months planning should be anticipated. Health professionals need plenty of advance notice. Other rules of thumb for a successful health fair are:

Site - A one-day fair for 500 people will require an area of at least 2,500 square feet (25x100). Consider access roads, restroom facilities, lighting, parking and accessibility for the handicapped. Fairs have been held in churches, schools, community centers, shopping malls and hospitals.

Layout - Prepare a layout of the fair and plan for noise distractions, privacy, and people waiting in line. Separate learn-by-doing activities from each other. Be sure to clearly note areas assigned to exhibitors. Those with similar themes may be grouped together.

Materials - Draw up a list of what you will need: electrical equipment, tables, chairs, easels, microphones, audio-visual equipment, pencils, etc. These are items that are easily overlooked in the last minute rush.

Registration - Packets can be distributed at the registration. They can include a health fair map and list of activities, health fair carrying bag, health button and nametag.

Timing - Check the calendar before scheduling your event. Try not to conflict with other activities in the community which could affect attendance.

Permits - Food service, sanitary, sign, structural and other permits may be needed. Your local municipal clerk should be able to give you information. Remember, there are several levels of government — city, county, state, etc. — which may require various permits.

Exhibitors - In selecting potential exhibitors, consider the organization's compatibility with the aims and objectives of the fair. Also consider the organization's commitment to staffing, and its potential for capturing attention and stimulating audience participation.

Fees - You may consider charging a fee for exhibitors to offset rental, heating and lighting and other costs. Your decision on fees can be made by weighing such factors as whether the exhibitor is a non-profit organization, and whether it will reap a profit, directly or indirectly, as an exhibitor.

Giveaways - Plastic bags with your logo and message are an inexpensive way to keep your name before the public. They also make it easier for people to carry publications gathered at the fair. Other possible giveaways are buttons, posters, rulers and pencils. For information, look in the telephone book's Yellow Pages under "novelties."

Directions - Avoid confusion by posting signs, arrows, posters, etc., to direct participants to parking, exhibit areas, restrooms, mini-workshops, health fair entrance and/or registration, etc.

Clean-up - Make a firm agreement with the facility manager about when exhibits must be erected/dismantled, when the building will be cleaned, who will be responsible for cleaning, and how the furniture, equipment, etc., should be arranged.

Thank You! - As soon as the fair is over, thank everyone involved, *in writing*.



State of New York
George E. Pataki, Governor

Department of Health
Barbara A. DeBuono, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner

